

Issue NE-CW1303, released March 31, 2003, by the Nebraska Agricultural Statistics Service, USDA. For more information contact us at: 100 Centennial Mall North, Suite 298, Lincoln, NE 68508, 402-437-5541, e-mail at nass-ne@nass.usda.gov, Internet at <http://www.usda.gov/nass/>.

GENERAL: For the month of March 2003, temperatures have allowed wheat to break out of dormancy and continue its growth cycle. Available moisture is the concern for wheat growth as well as crops yet to be planted, according to the USDA's Nebraska Agricultural Statistics Service. March's precipitation provided some relief for the topsoil, but subsoil continued to show little difference from last fall. The state continued to be rated in extreme drought. Wheat condition improved but still rated below last year. Producer activities included spring fieldwork, planting preparations, and livestock care.

This release is based on reports and data from FSA county directors, county extension educators, NOAA, and the High Plains Climate Center. Current county specific comments plus current and historic PDF files of Weather and Crop reports can be found at: http://www.nass.usda.gov/ne/cropwthr/cmts_cur.htm

WEATHER: The present depth of snow statewide averaged about one tenth of an inch with some snow cover reported in the Northwest, North Central, and Southwest Districts. March temperatures averaged above normals the second and third weeks but below normals the first and fourth weeks of the month. Statewide, moisture occurred during the last week of March with largest amounts in the western half of the state.

CROPS: **Wheat** condition improved slightly this past month and rated 8 percent very poor, 20 poor, 41 fair, 30 good, and 1 excellent. While the good and excellent condition is nearly the same as last year, the amount of acreage rated poor and very poor is almost twice that of a year ago. **Hay and forage** supplies were mostly adequate to short statewide. The open winter has allowed producers to utilize stalk residue and limit the feeding of hay supplies.

LIVESTOCK: **Cattle and calves** condition rated 1 percent very poor, 5 poor, 32 fair, 52 good, and 10 excellent. Calving progressed to 67 percent complete with minimal newborn calf problems. Calf losses are mostly average to below average. Stalk fields continued to provide grazing potential, with some supplemental feeding continuing.

The following are comments from Nebraska's FSA County Executive Directors and county Extension Educators:

NORTHWEST

SCOTTSBLUFF/MORRILL: Irrigation length of season is still not known at this time. Growers have been real slow to do any field work waiting to see what irrigation water will be available and if they qualify for prevented planting.

SIOUX: Precipitation for March is three times average.

NORTHEAST

ANTELOPE: Small amount of moisture this week and above normal temperatures have started to green up the pastures.

MADISON/STANTON: Producers are disappointed in the moisture amounts in the last few rains/snow.

THURSTON: Calving conditions so far have been generally excellent. Subsoil levels continue to be a concern. Farmers continue to prepare for spring planting, repairing machinery, lining up fertilizer, chemicals, etc.

CENTRAL

DAWSON: We have had a little moisture, but not nearly enough. Some stalk shredding and fertilizer application in progress. There is major concern about water supplies for surface irrigation, however, other inputs are in good supply. Spring calving is going well with a few exceptions due to cold temperatures.

EAST CENTRAL

DODGE: Conditions for livestock are good. Farmers are making preparations for spring planting.

NANCE/BOONE: Calving season is in full swing. Producers reporting minimal losses. Much concern about having grass for cows this summer. A few crop producers have started anhydrous application this past week.

SARPY/DOUGLAS: Pastures and hay fields are greening up indicating there is some moisture in the top soil.

YORK: Producers are busy getting ready for spring time activities. Have seen some anhydrous going on.

SOUTHWEST

CHASE: Moisture received last week was very welcome but more is needed. Potatoes and oats are being planted.

FRONTIER: The wheat has come out of dormancy and there are many reports of winterkill, as much as 25 percent in some fields. The calving season is about ready to wind down, with spring work getting into high gear. The pastures are still bare with no grass in sight. Many are still feeding their cows.

KEITH/ARTHUR/GARDEN: Some good moisture received in late March. Wheat is greening up and looks to be in good shape.

SOUTH CENTRAL

FURNAS: Rain is needed to build up the subsoil moisture. There is not much moisture below 6 to 7 inches. Topsoil is fair in most areas but will not last long if moisture is not received.

HARLAN: Soil moisture is still far below normal. Everyone is very concerned about whether there will be grass this summer season.

PHELPS: Producers have started some field preparation, fertilizing, and machinery prep. Pasture conditions are very critical as drought conditions continue. Calving has progressed well, loss has been average.

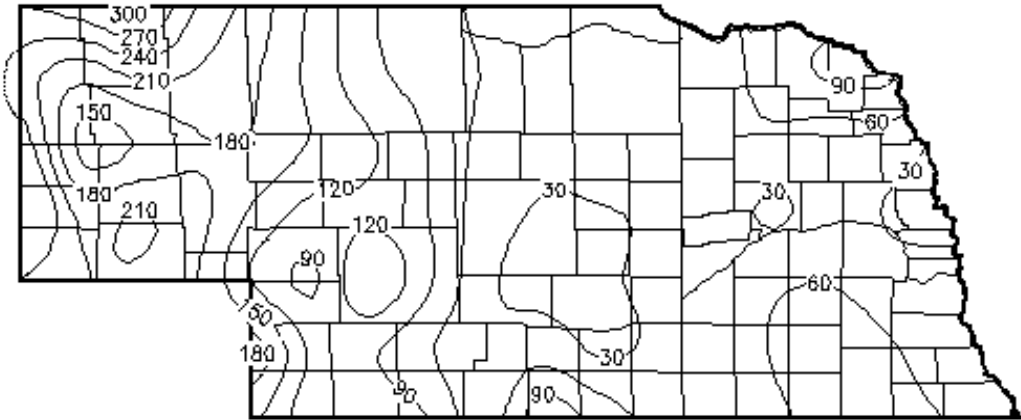
WEBSTER: It still remains very dry. Ponds are empty, grass wants to come, but there is really no subsoil moisture to speak of.

SOUTHEAST

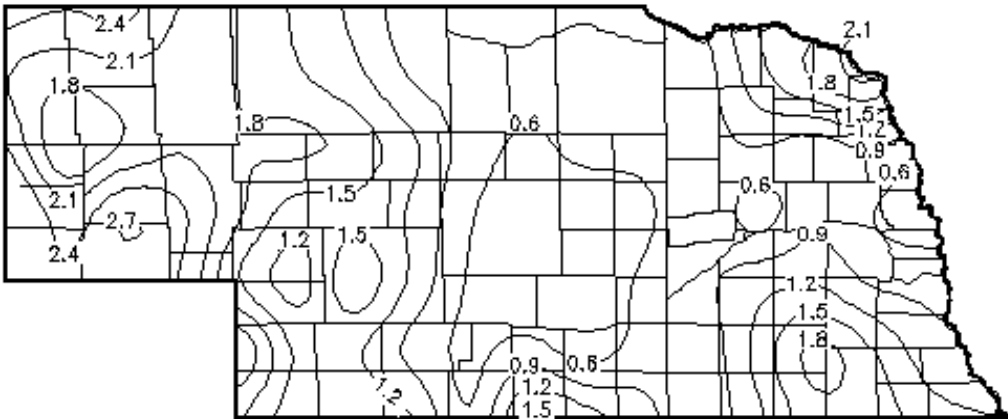
NEMAHA/JOHNSON/PAWNEE: The open winter has allowed the utilization of stalks and cattle producers have preserved their hay supplies for later this spring or next summer in case the forage production is below normal. Some producers are applying anhydrous ammonia.

PAWNEE: Some spring field work started and some are planning to start corn planting within a couple of weeks. Pastures are short and not growing much, but are greening up nicely. Water is down from normal in ponds.

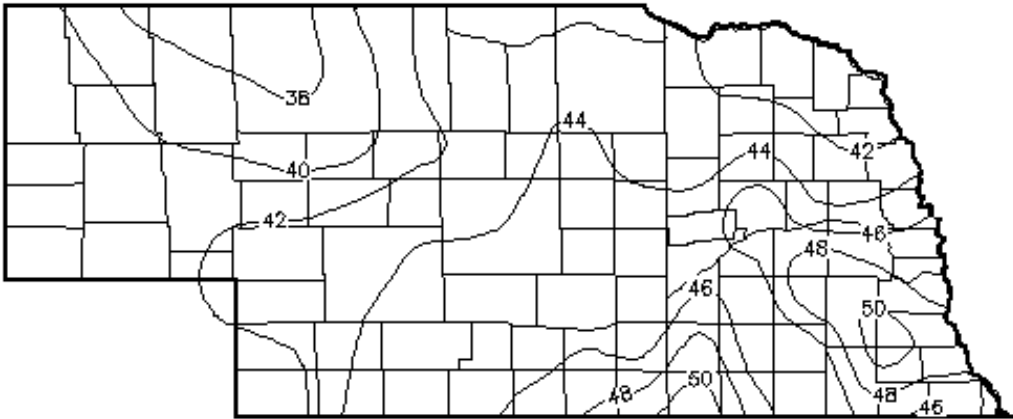
PRECIPITATION AS PERCENT OF NORMAL FOR MARCH 2003¹



PRECIPITATION IN INCHES FOR MONTH OF MARCH 2003¹



SEVEN DAY AVERAGE TEMPERATURE AT THE FOUR INCH DEPTH UNDER BARE SOIL¹



¹ Source: High Plains Regional Climate Centers Automated Weather Data Network (AWDN).